Astoria seeks money to replace Irving Avenue bridge

Last bridge in need of major work

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Daily Astorian

Astoria plans to apply for funding for a $6.5 million bridge replacement project on Irving Avenue.

Located at 33rd Street, just east of the Cathedral Tree trailhead, the bridge is the last bridge within city limits in need of replacement. The 1950s-era wood and concrete structure does not meet current standards and is already load-limited due to significant deterioration noted by the Oregon Department of Transportation, which inspects the bridge annually.

The City Council approved the submittal of a local bridge project application for the 2022-2024 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program under the state's Local Bridge Program at a meeting Monday night. The city's Franklin Bridge and another bridge on Irving Avenue were replaced using this funding source.

Though total costs are estimated at $6.5 million, Astoria will need to come up with an estimated $670,000 in matching funds. It is possible the city could use money it will receive from a recently passed state transportation law. If the city lands the grant, City Manager Brett Estes said staff would return with a specific proposal on how they plan to come up with the matching funds.

"We just do not want to miss an opportunity to get this final bridge replaced," he said.

Mayor Arline LaMear pointed out that even if the city does get the grant, construction is six years down the road.

So in the meantime, she asked, "do we dare drive across it?"

City Engineer Jeff Harrington said that while the bridge is in need of replacement load limits, annual inspections and small repairs keep it safe for now.

A bridge at 19th Street and Irving Avenue built in 1946 was replaced two years ago. During construction, it was closed to vehicle traffic. The closure impacted the neighborhood as well as other Astoria residents, who often use the winding Irving Avenue as a way to cut around traffic in the downtown corridor, especially during the busy summer tourism season.

In other business:

• The City Council approved the creation of a new recreation manager position for the Parks and Recreation Department. The manager would be in charge of the department's Recreation Division and responsible for a variety of items, including pursuing the sale of park lands and looking at long-term solutions for parks funding. The parks master plan finalized in 2016 emphasized the need to increase staff capacity, noted Parks and Recreation Director Angela Cosby in a memo to the councilors.

The salary for the recreation manager position could range between $57,567 to $69,973 a year.

• Another need identified in the parks master plan was also addressed Monday night when the City Council approved a parks and recreation marketing plan for the fiscal year.

"Most advertising is done sporadically, mostly through social media," the plan states. But the department hopes to reach customers more often and more consistently by offering discounts and giveaways, investing in advertising on a variety of platforms and adding bilingual communication and marketing materials, among other strategies.

Poll: Half have unfavorable view of Brown, but would re-elect her

By PARIS ACHEN
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Half of Oregonians view Gov. Kate Brown unfavorably yet would re-elect her by a narrow margin if the election was conducted now, according to an online survey by Nashville-based pollster icitizen.

Forty percent said they would vote for state Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, to unseat the first-term governor, the survey shows.

The survey of 645 respondents, paid for by icitizen, is the first glimpse into the mindset of Oregonians more than a year before the November 2018 gubernatorial election.

Jim Moore, director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University, said the responses to Brown are unsurprising.

"While she is a fairly popular governor, she hasn't really done anything to put her name on," Moore said.

"Clearly, this is a message for her campaign to communicate what she has done that makes her worthy to be governor again."

The respondents — part of a "convenience panel" of Oregonians icitizen uses for online polls — were not confirmed as registered voters, said Cynthia Villacis, the company's polling director.

Favorable opinions for Brown were stronger in the Portland area and the Willamette Valley, 45 percent and 55 percent, respectively. In the rest of the state, only 37 percent of respondents said they had a favorable opinion of her, while 62 percent gave unfavorable feedback.

Out of all respondents, 341 were members of the GOP. In Oregon, only 26.7 percent of registered voters are Republican, 29.5 percent are unaffiliated and 36.7 percent are Democrat, according to the most recent statistics from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

"That sounds to me as if (icitizen) oversampled Republicans," Moore said.

Leslie Rich, a senior vice president of client services, said the results are weighted to reflect the state's electorate makeup of different party affiliations.

Political pundits see the results as a bad sign for the Republican challenger, an orthopedic surgeon who was elected as a state representative in 2014. Buehler also challenged Brown in 2012 for secretary of state.

When Oregonians were asked their preferred Republican to face off with Brown, a majority chose a Republican who hasn't even filed as a candidate and has had no media attention.

About 31 percent of respondents said Greg Wooldridge, a former commander of the Navy's Blue Angels, is their preferred GOP candidate. Meanwhile, only 28 percent identified Buehler as their preferred choice.

Wooldridge is familiar to conservative circles, where he has served as a delegate to the National Republican Convention, but is lesser known outside of his party.

Wooldridge is considering a bid for the Republican nomination and has met with several former gubernatorial candidates and political consultants.

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